

HOW CAN I MODEL WRITING IN MY CLASSROOM?

Writing can be modeled in several ways. First, teachers can identify and share samples of writing taken from the content area. Students may be surprised to learn about writing done in the field of mathematics, agricultural education, or automotive repair. Students benefit from exposure to authentic content area documents; rather than reading about a daycare budget request, they can actually read one. Teachers can also provide overt instruction about the expectations for writing in the specific discipline and have students use those expectations as they model a piece of writing after the samples they have studied. For example, after reading three reviews of plays, students can discuss the expectations (in terms of form, tone, and content) of a newspaper review before writing their own review of a school play in a newspaper class. If the compositions won't be submitted to a publication, teachers can post writing samples produced by students in the classroom. Finally, teachers can model writing by writing with their own students. The writing process is made less mysterious for students when they can see someone demonstrate how to brainstorm ideas, select a topic, develop a draft, and revise it while producing a document appropriate to the particular content area. Finally, teachers can use selected student writing to model effective student compositions.

Modeling can be done using copies of writing produced by teachers, students, or professionals. Teachers can put writing on the overhead for analysis, post it on a technological platform such as Blackboard and elicit online discussion of it, or compose on the spot using a word processor connected to a projector. Students can examine writing individually or in pairs before large group discussion in order to give them time to collect their thoughts and analyze what they see. Prompts can be helpful as students analyze writing that they eventually want to model their own writing after. For example, students can be asked to create a graphic representation of the writing (using a specific graphic organizer or their own method) to figure out issues of form that may be typical to that type of writing. Or, they may be asked to notice what kind of content is typically included in all three examples of a particular kind of writing.

Another way to model writing is to have students analyze the characteristics of a particular genre of writing appropriate to the field. For example, students can analyze ten different word problems in algebra and make a list of all of the features that they have in common before having to create their own original word problems. They can also analyze samples of writing in a discipline and make a list of evaluative criteria that could be used to determine the quality of that kind of writing. For example, students could read several sets of instructions for various computer repair tasks and make a list of the criteria that distinguishes the strongest from the weakest before writing their own handbooks to be shared with students who join the class after the course has already begun.

E X A M P L E

In Marketing, students collect and evaluate brochures advertising local cleaning services. They analyze the brochures for effectiveness and use the strongest ones as models for brochures they will be creating for mock businesses.

E X A M P L E

In Horticulture II, students write speeches to be delivered to an audience unfamiliar with agricultural education. Each speech identifies a current agricultural problem in the state and proposes a logical solution.